



THE CONNOISSEUR.

By Mr. T O W N,
CRITIC and CENSOR-GENERAL.

NUMBER CXXVI.

THURSDAY, June 24, 1756.

Proinde tona eloquio, solitum tibi—— VIRG.



Remember a rector of a parish at the court end of the town, who was generally accounted a very fine preacher, that used to aim at delivering himself in the most bold and animated stile of oratory. The tone of his voice was nicely accommodated to the different branches of his discourse, and every thing was pronounced with uncommon energy and emphasis; he also indulged himself in equal freedom of action, and abounded in various extraordinary gesticulations; his sermons themselves were sown thick with tropes, metaphors, and similies, and every where enriched with *apostrophe* and *prosopopæia*.

VOL. II.

5 U

A 8

As I knew that this reverend gentleman had been abroad with a young nobleman in the capacity of a travelling tutor, I did not wonder at the violent exertion of his voice, and the vehemence of his action; as this is a piece of clerical foppery, which an itinerant clergyman is apt to adopt, while his pupil is gleaning all the other follies of *Paris*: at which place it is very common to see a *capuchine* so heated with his subject, that he often seems in danger of throwing himself out of the pulpit. But I was at a loss how to account for the glowing stile of his discourses, till happening to turn over the works of a celebrated *French* preacher, I found that the oratorical performances of my friend were no other than faithful translations of them.

THIS sort of pulpit plagiarism may perhaps be more adapted to the taste of some of our fashionable declaimers, than the more hackneyed method of transcribing a page from *Barrow*, *Tillotson*, or *Atterbury*: but although such practices may be less liable to detection, it is certainly more orthodox to rifle the works of our own Divines, than to ransack the treasures of *Romish* priests; and their inflamed orations are undoubtedly less adapted to the genius of our people, than the sober reasonings of our own preachers. It must be owned indeed that some of our clergy are greatly wanting in that life and spirit, which would render their instructions more affecting as well as more pleasing. Their sermons are frequently drawn out in one continued drawl, without any variation of voice or gesture: so that it is no wonder, if some of the congregation should be caught napping, when the preacher himself hardly seems

seems to be awake. But though this drowly delivery is not to be commended, yet a serious earnestness is most likely to engage the attention, and convince the reason. This manner, as it is most decent in itself, is best suited to an *English* audience; though it is no wonder that a different strain of oratory should prevail in *France*, since a *Frenchman* accompanies almost every word in ordinary conversation with some fantastic gesture, and even enquires concerning your health, and talks of the weather, with a thousand thrugs and grimaces.

BUT though I do not like to see a preacher lazily rolling on the cushion, or dozing over his sermon-case, and haranguing his audience with an unchristian apathy; yet even this unanimated delivery is perhaps less offensive, than to observe a clergyman less assiduous to instruct his audience, than to be admired by them. A sober divine should not ascend the pulpit with the same passions that a public orator mounts the *rostrum*: much less should he assume the voice, gesture, and deportment of a player, and the language of the theatre. He should preserve a temperance in the most earnest parts of his discourse, and go through the whole of it in such a manner, as best agrees with the solemn place in which it is uttered. Pompous nonsense, bellowed out with a thundering accent, comes with a worse grace from the pulpit, than bombast and fustian injudiciously ranted forth by a "periwig-pated fellow" on the stage. I cannot better illustrate the absurdity and indecency of this manner, than by a familiar, though shameful, instance of it. Whoever has occasionally joined with the butchers in making up the audience of the *Clare-Market*

Orator

Orator will agree with me, that the impropriety of his stile and the extravagance of his action become still more shocking and intolerable by the day which they prophane, and the ecclesiastical appearance of the place in which the declaimer harangues. Thus while those who thunder out damnation from parish pulpits, may, from assuming the manners of the theatre, be resembled to ranting players; the *Clare-Market* Orator, while he turns religion into farce, must be considered as exhibiting shews and interludes of an inferior nature, and himself regarded as a Jack-pudding in a gown and cassock.

A BLOATED stile is perhaps of all others least to be commended. It is more frequently made a shelter for nonsense, than a vehicle of truth: but though improper on all occasions, it more especially deviates from the chaste plainness and simplicity of Pulpit Eloquence. Nor am I less displeased with those who are admired by some as *pretty* preachers; as I think a clergyman may be a coxcomb in his stile and manner, as well as a prig in his appearance. Flowers of rhetoric injudiciously scattered over a sermon are as disgusting in his discourse, as the snug wig and scented white handkerchief in his dress. The *pretty* preacher aims also at politeness and good-breeding, takes the ladies to task in a genteel vein of raillery, and handles their modish foibles with the same air that he gallants their fans: but if he has a mind to put his abilities to the stretch, and indulge himself in a more than ordinary flow of rhetoric, he fritters away the solemnity of some scriptural subject; and I have heard a flourishing declaimer of this cast take off from the awful idea of the Passion by dwelling principally on the gracefulness of person, sweetness of voice, and elegance of deportment
in

in the Divine Sufferer; and at another time in speaking of the Fall, I have known him enter into a picturesque description of the woods, groves, and rivulets, pansies, pinks, and violets, that threw a perpetual gaiety over the face of nature in the garden of *Eden*.

AFFECTED oratory and an extravagant delivery were first practised by those who vary from the regular established church: nor is there any manner so unbecoming and indecent, which has not at one time or another been accounted truly spiritual and graceful. Snuffling through the nose with an harmonious twang has been regarded as a kind of church-music best calculated to raise devotion, and a piteous chorus of sighs and groans has been thought the most effectual call to repentance. Irregular tremblings of the voice and contortions of the person have long been the eloquence of Quakers and Presbyterians; and are now the favourite mode of preaching practised by those self-ordained teachers, who strike out new lights in religion, and pour forth their extempore rhapsodies in a torrent of enthusiastical oratory. An inspired cobbler will thunder out anathemas, with the tone and gesture of *St. Paul*, from a joint-stool; and an enlightened brick-layer will work himself up to such a pitch of vehemence, as shall make his audience quake again. I am sorry to see our regular divines rather copying than reforming this hot and extravagant manner of preaching; and have with pain been witness to a wild intemperate delivery in our parish-churches, which I should only have expected at the chapel in *Long-Acre*, or at the Foundery and Tabernacle in *Moor-Fields*.

As a serious earnestness in the delivery, and a nervous simplicity in the stile of a discourse, are the most becoming ornaments of the pulpit, so an affectation of eloquence is no where so offensive. The delivery of a preacher as well as his diction should, like his dress, be plain and decent. Inflamed eloquence and wild gestures are unsuitable to the place and his function; and though such vehement heat may perhaps kindle the zeal of a few enthusiastic old beldams in the isle, it has a very different effect on the more rational part of the congregation. I would therefore recommend it to our fashionable divines to aim at being Preachers rather than Orators or Actors, and to endeavour to make their discourses appear like Sermons rather than Orations.

O

Just Published,

In Two Neat Pocket Volumes, Price Six Shillings bound,

The CONNOISSEUR revised and corrected.

With a new Translation of the *Mottos and Quotations.*